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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4362
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 2916
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1131
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RUEHVB/AMEMBASSY ZAGREB 2933
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE
RUFNPKB/COMUSNAVEUR POLAD NAPLES IT
RUEHNA/DEA HQS WASHDC
RUCNFB/FBI WASHINGTON DC
RUEAHLA/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHFJUSC/US CUSTOMS SERVICE WASHDC
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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE (MBENEDICT)
NSC FOR BRAUN

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SUBJECT: MEDIA AND NGO SCRUTINY PROMPTS INVESTIGATION INTO
CLAIM OF POLICE BRUTALITY

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE HANDLE APPROPRIATELY.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Albanian media have reported widely on the alleged police mistreatment of a suspected international drug trafficker and fugitive from US justice. A local human rights NGO and the Albanian prosecutor's office are investigating possible police misconduct. At the height of the media frenzy surrounding the case, Amnesty International (AI) released its 2005 report highlighting violence and abuse by police and prison officials of a number of criminal detainees. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On May 19, 2006, Armando Andoni (DOB 09JUN1974, AKA Arjan Selimi, AKA Brian Foster Burke), a fugitive wanted by the US Marshalls Service was to be taken before an Albanian magistrate for fingerprinting in order to positively confirm his identity. Media reported that in an attempt to avoid fingerprinting, Andoni removed all of his clothing except his underpants under the mistaken belief that he would not be forced to go before a judge in such a state. When it became apparent that he was to be taken regardless of his partial nudity, Andoni violently resisted removal from his cell. Bleeding and dressed only in his underwear, Andoni was ultimately taken before a judge, but the judge declined to proceed with the fingerprinting. (NOTE: Born in Albania, Andoni and his family settled in the US in 1986. In 1998, Andoni was arrested in Michigan for the distribution of approximately 1000 kg of marijuana. Released on bail, he fled the US. Upon arrival in Albania he assumed the identity Arjan Selimi. END NOTE)

13. (SBU) On May 22, the Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG) released a public statement denouncing what it described as the excessive use of force against Andoni, an act which it characterized as a human rights violation. AHRG conducted its own investigation into the matter and concluded that Andoni's wounds could not have been self-inflicted, as had been

suggested by the police. Elsa Ballauri, Executive Director of the AHRG, told us that her organization was concerned about the lack of professionalism in the Albanian police and particularly the excessive use of force when handling crime suspects. Ballauri said that a lawyer from the AHRG visited Andoni in his cell following the incident and concluded that the defendant had been severely beaten, including wounds to the back of his body. Following the release of the AHRG statement, the Tirana District Prosecutor's Office opened an investigation into the incident.

¶4. (SBU) The 2005 AI report highlighted the fact that a number of detainees have reported that they were subjected to violence or abuse during arrest, in police custody, or in prison. Released on May 24, the report indicated that in only a few cases were the offending officers disciplined.

¶5. (SBU) Even before the fingerprinting incident, the Andoni case had created a local media sensation when a video of Andoni and his girlfriend, Inis Gjoni (a semi-famous Albanian personality) was circulated widely here. The video, taken from Andoni's cell phone, shows the naked couple snorting a white powder substance (presumed to be cocaine). Andoni's defense lawyer has asserted that these images were inappropriately released to the public by investigators in a deliberate attempt to embarrass him.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT. The extensive media coverage of the alleged abuse, the championing of the issue by a local human rights NGO, and the launch of an investigation into police misconduct indicate, perhaps anecdotally, that Albania is increasingly able to monitor and combat human rights abuse on its own. Nevertheless, the AI report and Andoni's alleged mistreatment underscore the need for better training and

professionalism within the criminal justice system. Poor treatment of detainees weakens the GoA's credibility especially when it is doing the right thing in cracking down on organized crime and corruption. END COMMENT.

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